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Q6(a)

Parliamentary Committees are a strong tool of Parliamentary Democracy. It provides for the opportunity for cross-pollination of ideas among members of the Parliament. Discuss

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- Explain parliamentary committees as a working form of parliamentary democracy
- Show how they allow cross-pollination among members across party and House lines
- Discuss Department-related **Standing Committees**, financial committees, and select committees
- **Add limits:** whipping, opacity, and executive dominance

Revision summary

Parliamentary committees are the efficient working form of Indian parliamentary democracy, where bills, grants, and CAG reports can be examined in detail.

Department-related **Standing Committees** mix Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members across ministries; PAC, Estimates, and COPU are the financial core.

Cross-pollination happens because the whip is weaker, witnesses bring expertise, and members may agree on technical text they would never concede in the well of the House.

The tool fails when bills are not referred, demands are guillotined, or ordinances replace debate.

Committees strengthen democracy only if the House and the executive treat their reports as more than annual ritual.

Introduction

Parliament in full House is a theatre of majority and opposition. Parliament in committee is a workshop. **Walter Bagehot** already distinguished the dignified and efficient parts of the constitution. In India, the committee system is the efficient part of parliamentary democracy: smaller rooms, papers, witnesses, and the chance for members to think across the aisle. The question is right to link that chance with cross-pollination of ideas.

Body

Why committees are a strong tool

A sitting of 700-odd members cannot vet a finance bill line by line, nor sit with the Defence Secretary on preparedness. Department-related **Standing Committees**, created in two waves (1993 and 2004) after the **Rules Committee** and the experience of other Westminster systems, cover ministries. They examine demands for grants, bills, and long-term policy. The

Public Accounts Committee, guided by CAG reports and traditionally chaired by an opposition member, and the Estimates and **Public Undertakings Committees**, are the older financial trinity from the **G. V. Mavalankar** and **Asok Chanda** years of parliamentary culture.

Select and joint committees on bills - GST in its long gestation, or more recently high-salience social bills when they are actually referred - force the executive to answer clause by clause. **Ivor Jennings** called committees the House in miniature. Indian practice adds a federal flavour when Rajya Sabha members sit with Lok Sabha members on DRSCs, mixing states' voices with the majority's mandate.

Cross-pollination

In committee, the whip is weaker, cameras are fewer, and expertise can outrank the day's slogan. A backbencher from a regional party may persuade a ruling-party specialist on a technical amendment. Retired secretaries, scholars, and industry appear as witnesses; members borrow language from one another's notes. This is **Mill's** representative government as discussion, not only as counting. It is also a mild version of **Arendt's** space of appearance: speech that is recorded in a report even if the vote in the House later follows the whip.

The 2002-2010s education and defence reports often show bipartisan paragraphs that Question Hour would not produce.

Limits

Money bills, ordinances, and guillotined grants empty the workshop. Leaderships punish dissent. Referral of bills has declined in some sessions. Cross-pollination is real only if the House reads the reports and the majority does not treat committee as a waiting room for the whip.

Flow diagram

House theatre -> Committee workshop
Committee workshop -> Department standing
Committee workshop -> PAC Estimates COPU
Committee workshop -> Cross-party ideas
Cross-party ideas -> Better statutes if heard

Conclusion

Committees make parliamentary democracy workable by specialising scrutiny and by letting ideas move across party and House lines. They are strong when bills and budgets go there and when reports matter. They fail when the executive legislates by surprise. The cross-pollination the question names is the civic justification of the system, not a guaranteed harvest.

Facts & figures

DRSCs, 1993 and 2004

India expanded department-related standing committees to cover all ministries, with members from both Houses.

PAC convention

The **Public Accounts Committee** is customarily chaired by an opposition member, a working check in a majority House.

Referral decline

Several recent Lok Sabha periods have sent a smaller share of bills to committees, which weakens the workshop function.

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